

Fine's bill would expand 'cyberbullying' law

By [Bill Smith](#) on April 16, 2014 - 2:10pm



Laura Fine

A state lawmaker who represents Evanston has won House approval of a bill that would expand an existing anti-bullying statute to cover messages sent from off-campus computers.

The legislation, [HB4207](#), sponsored by State Rep. Laura Fine, D-Glenview, passed the House earlier this month on an 85-21 vote and is awaiting action in the state Senate.

Evanston's two other state representatives, Robyn Gabel and Kelly Cassidy, voted in favor of the measure.

The bill would expand on [anti-bullying legislation adopted in 2010](#).

Fine says, "Through the Internet, social media and cell phones, students can face constant harassment, which impedes their education and damages their self-esteem. This legislation aims to hold bullying children accountable for their actions regardless of where it occurs."

Under current law, students face discipline for bullying only if the act takes place on school grounds, at a school activity or on a school computer.

Fine's bill would apply to any cyberbullying action that officials concluded "causes a substantial disruption to the educational process or orderly operation of a school" but would apply only when teachers or school administrators received a report of a problem. It would not require them to staff or monitor any non-school-related activity, function, or program.

The bill does not specify what penalties might be applied to students who school administrators determine are guilty of cyberbullying, but requires schools to "provide the victim with information regarding services that are available within the district and community, such as counseling, support services, and other programs."

Cyberbullying statutes have been criticized by the [American Civil Liberties Union](#) and other groups as an infringement on free speech rights.

Two years ago the ACLU [sued the Griffith Public Schools](#) in Indiana after the district expelled three eighth grade girls over comments they posted on Facebook that talked about killing another student.